

ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

Zen Master Seung Sahn, renowned master in the Korean Buddhist tradition, and founder of the international Kwan Um School of Zen, died on Tuesday, November 30, at Hwa Gye Sa temple in Seoul, Korea. He died peacefully, surrounded by his students. He was 77. There will be a one-year memorial ceremony in Korea on November 19, 2005 (*see back cover*).

Zen Master Seung Sahn was born in 1927 in Seun Choen, North Korea to Protestant Christian parents. He grew up during a time when Korea was under Japanese military rule, when political and cultural freedoms were heavily suppressed. After the Second World War, he studied Western philosophy at Dong Guk University in Seoul but became deeply dissatisfied with his ability to help his country through political activities or academic knowledge. He eventually ordained as a Buddhist monk in October, 1948 and soon after started an extremely rigorous one hundred day solo chanting retreat in the mountains. On the last day of his retreat, he got enlightenment and attained his true nature. In 1949, he received teaching transmission from Zen Master Ko Bong, becoming the 78th patriarch in his line of succession from the Buddha. In 1957, he became the abbot of Hwa Gye Sah temple in Seoul, and became involved in reforming the Chogye Order.

Zen Master Seung Sahn began his international teaching in 1966, founding a Korean Buddhist temple in Tokyo, and later a temple in Hong Kong. In 1972, Zen Master Seung Sahn came to the United States, becoming the first Korean Zen master to live and teach in the west. He accepted an invitation to move to Rhode Island and quickly attracted a group of Brown University students, who moved in with him to found the Providence Zen Center. Constantly on the move, accepting invitations to teach all over the United States, Zen Master Seung Sahn soon founded centers in Cambridge, New Haven, New York, Los Angeles, Berkeley, and other American cities.

In 1978, he made his first teaching trip to Europe, which is now home to dozens of his Zen centers and groups.

In 1983, he founded the Kwan Um School of Zen as the organizing body for his growing international network of Zen centers and groups. The School is headquartered at its international head temple, Providence Zen Center, which is now in Cumberland, Rhode Island. By the time of his death, Zen Master Seung Sahn and his students had established more than a hundred Zen centers and groups in more than thirty countries, including over thirty centers in the United States.

As a result of his efforts, he inspired more than a thousand disciples to practice Zen and of these, a number ordained as Zen monks and nuns. In a book entitled *Buddha and Vision*, published by Cambridge University's Religious Department professors, he was designated along with the Tibetan Buddhist leader Dalai Lama, the Vietnamese monk Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Cambodian Ven. Maha Ghosananda as one of the "Four Living Buddhas of the World."

In June 2004, he received the title "Great Master" from the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism, in appreciation for his lifetime of teaching. This is the highest honor the order confers.

Zen Master Seung Sahn was the author of six books in English: *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*, *Only Don't Know*, *Ten Gates*, *Bone of Space*, *The Whole World is a Single Flower*, and *Compass of Zen*.